DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 392 940 CE 071 082

AUTHOR Torkington, Kate
TITLE The Rationale for Experiential/Participatory Learning. Working Papers in Early Childhood Development 16.
INSTITUTION Bernard Van Leer Foundation, The Hague (Netherlands).
REPORT NO ISSN-1383-7907
PUB DATE Feb 96
NOTE 34p.; Paper is extracted from pack entitled "Enhancing the Skills of Early Childhood."
AVAILABLE FROM Bernard van Leer Foundation, Communications Section, P.O. Box 82334, 2508 EH The Hague, The Netherlands (single copies free; multiple copies: charge for postage and handling).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Active Learning; Adult Education; *Adult Learning; Child Development; Class Activities; *Experiential Learning; Learning Activities; *Student Participation; Teaching Methods; Training

ABSTRACT

Experiential learning has been defined as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of the experience of the learner who is at the center of the learning process. Modern experiential learning theory begins with John Dewey and his "Experience and Education" (1938). Coleman (1976) describes traditional learning as "information assimilation" and the steps in experiential learning as being almost the reverse of those in traditional learning. Other contributors to experiential learning are Lewin, Piaget, Jung, Rogers, Perls, Maslow, Freire, and Illich. The body of theory relating to experiential learning includes theories of learning and teaching, the relationship of theory and practice in training, and adult learning and adult learners. Introducing experiential training methods presents such problems as the self-perpetuating nature of learning, credibility, large numbers of trainees, and the training of trainers. Trainers who want to design their own training course using experiential methods should decide that practice will be the focus of the training, begin with a diagnostic approach, avoid beginning courses with theory, use analysis of practice as the basis of the group training session, encourage peer support, spend time with trainees in their practice situation, be sensitive to cultural and traditional practices, develop materials and activities, and review assessment methods. Contains 18 references, an 18-item bibliography, and a 16-item list of Working Papers in Early Childhood Development.) (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 392 940

16

Working Papers in Early Childhood Development

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R N Cohen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE071082

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Bernard van Leer Foundation

Editorial history

Underpinning the Foundation's Mandate are a number of principles which guide the Foundation's work with children, families and communities. Training in the participatory mode is the method that best complements the principles of the Foundation, and the Foundation is committed to its ethos. To this end, the Foundation has produced a training pack entitled *Enhancing the skills of early childhood trainers* which brings together an established content area in early childhood development theory with experiential participatory training methods. The pack, which has been developed over a number of years, is aimed at trainers of trainers and is to be used either as part of a course or for self-learning.

Enhancing the skills of early childhood trainers has been co-published with UNESCO, and is available from UNESCO publishing, Promotion and Sales Division, 1 rue Miollis, 70032 Paris Cedex 15, France.
Fax: +33.1.42733007.
ISBN 92-3-1031330-9. The pack costs French Francs 150.

ISSN 1383-7907
ISBN 90-6195-040-6

Design: Emmerik & Emmerik

About the author

Kate Torkington is the Head of Training of the Bernard van Leer Foundation. She is qualified as a teacher and as a social worker, and has a BA (Admin) and an MA. She has worked for many years in the UK as a teacher trainer and has also trained social workers and para-professionals. Kate has always seen education and training in the context of the family and community. She joined the Foundation in 1988, and is at present working as Coordinator of the Training Initiative in 10 countries in Africa with the ultimate aim of improving the situation for young children and families in these countries. Information on the Training Initiative is available from the Foundation at the address on the back cover. She was responsible for writing and producing the training pack Enhancing the skills of early childhood trainers (see the Editorial history section for details) from which this paper is extracted.

The photographs are from projects supported by the Foundation in Belgium, Brazil, China, Ireland, Netherlands Antilles, and South Africa.

Working Papers in
Early Childhood Development

16

Kate Torkington

The rationale for experiential / participatory learning

Bernard van Leer Foundation, *February 1996*

INTRODUCTION

For many years the Bernard van Leer Foundation has supported development projects and programmes in developing and industrialised countries. Its work is focused on improving the lives of very young children in disadvantaged circumstances, using a development approach which empowers families and communities.

To this end, the Foundation sees training as one of the most important ways to build the capacities of project staff and their target groups by developing skills and strengths. It can also be an effective way to disseminate the learning from the projects as well as the principles on which they work.

How trainers train is of equal, if not of more, importance, than the content of their training activities. Those who plan training courses are often preoccupied with what trainees need to *know*. As a result, not nearly enough attention is given to training methods.

The Foundation is committed to the *active, participatory, experiential learning approach*. The terms 'active' and 'participatory' refer to the trainee's behaviour in the learning situation. Instead of the trainee being a passive recipient of a one-way process of knowledge transmission, he or she becomes an active participator with the trainer in defining and designing the learning situation. The term 'experiential' refers to a learning situation in which the trainer deliberately draws on past and present experiences of the trainee to enrich the learning process. Working together, trainer and trainee can construct situations which give the trainee first-hand experiences during the training itself. These experiences can illuminate and bring greater understanding of theoretical concepts.

The Foundation believes that the most effective ECD strategies are those in which parents are the key figures. By emphasising adult education approaches, we hope that professional and para-professional workers in ECD will be able to work much more effectively with parents.

While this paper has essentially an adult education/training focus, at the same time it does have a child-centred focus. If influential trainers adopt experiential and participatory training methods with their adult trainees, such training methods will then filter to others. This will result in more appropriate and effective interventions with children and families.

This paper is extracted from a pack entitled *Enhancing the skills of early childhood trainers*. This pack is only available from UNESCO, Paris. For further details please see the Editorial History section on the inside front cover.

'I hear
and I forget;
I see
and I remember;
I do
and I understand.'

ancient Chinese proverb

THE RATIONALE FOR EXPERIENTIAL/ PARTICIPATORY LEARNING

This Working Paper provides a rationale for an active experiential learning approach to training. Before moving on to review this body of theory, there is need to state why the Bernard van Leer Foundation is committed to the active experiential mode of training. Underpinning the Foundation's Mandate are a number of principles which guide the Foundation's work with children, families and communities. These principles include:
- the empowerment of people and communities
- building on the strengths of individuals and communities
- the development of confidence and greater control over their own lives of people and communities living in disadvantaged circumstances.

Experiential learning has as a central part of its agenda an ethos that students should:
- have greater control over their learning
- build on their own experience
- develop their own self-confidence and thus empower themselves.

The participation and involvement of students/learners are essential in this process. To ensure that this happens, trainers/educators must be willing to relinquish some control of the learning process.

It is clear that training in the active/experiential and participatory mode is the method that best complements the principles of the Foundation. Much of the Foundation's work occurs in the fields of adult education, community education and development and the training of para-professionals. These are exactly the areas in which experiential learning has developed most and proved particularly effective. Many trainers/educators are far more familiar with the traditional didactic methods so common in schools and universities. For those with a purely academic background, experiential learning methods and philosophy may be very unfamiliar. This paper will attempt to condense the diverse literature on experiential learning and incorporate some relevant theoretical perspectives. It is clear that some trainers/educators need cogent arguments to convince them that an active experiential learning approach will result in more effective training than traditional didactic approaches. It is our hope that this paper will provide a body of theory about

experiential learning which will support personal experiences of this method. In addition, at the end we have provided a list of references and a bibliography to allow those who wish to, to follow up more theoretical interests.

The body of theory relating to experiential learning includes:
- theories of learning and teaching
- experiential learning *per se*
- the relationship of theory and practice in training
- adult learning and adult learners.

Each of these will be discussed below.

What is experiential learning?

Experiential learning has been defined as **the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of the experience of the learner who is at the centre of the learning process.** This definition was formulated by Kolb (1984), an acknowledged leader in the field of experiential learning theory.

Experiential learning is as old as recorded history. Nearly all learning is, at bottom, a mix of the experiential and the didactic. Someone learned by doing and then informed others of what was learned. As knowledge grew, language and instruction became the preferred way of teaching. However, when knowledge was required for acting in the world, learning by doing was also essential.

In the teaching of skills, practice has always been central. For example, in medieval Europe, systems of guilds and apprenticeship grew up. Today, the common phrase '*practice makes perfect*' acknowledges the learning that comes from experience.

Experiential learning methods present a challenge to trainers and educators. Trainers have to give up some power and control of content to students, modify time honoured methods and be more open to criticism. Kolb (op cit), not surprisingly, refers to distrust of the student's own experience and experiential methods as sources of learning. He related this distrust to the revolution in technology coming out of scientific method. This has convinced us that the only things really worth knowing are those that can be proved by scientific experiment.

Attempts to introduce experiential learning methods into teaching situations have sometimes earned the description 'gimmicky' and 'faddish'. Chickering (1977), an academic himself, says that: '*There is something about experiential learning that raises the hackles of even the most unflappable academics*'.

However, as Kolb puts it,

> 'Experiential learning is not a series of techniques to be applied in current practice but a programme for profoundly re-creating our personal lives and social systems.'

There are distinct signs of progress in accepting experiential learning:
- increasing dissatisfaction with and challenge to traditional examinations and diplomas as indicators of human abilities

– strong movements to validate previous experience as an element of vocational training
– increasing use of active experiential training methods in business and management training.

Chickering (1977), pointing out the need for universities to change, supports Kolb's view of the social and personal effects of experiential learning:

> '... there is no question that issues raised by experiential learning go to the heart of the academic enterprise. Experiential learning leads us to question the assumptions and conventions underlying many of our practices. It turns us away from credit hours and calendar time towards competence, working knowledge and information pertinent to jobs, family relationships, community responsibilities and broad social concerns. It reminds us that higher education can do more than develop verbal skills and deposit information in those storage banks between the ears.'

Historical overview

Writers on experiential learning theory Keeton (1982), Kolb (1984) and Wilson et al (1989), are agreed on the chronological progress of modern experiential learning theory beginning with John Dewey and his 'Experience and Education' (1938). However, Keeton (op cit) traces its roots to Aristotle, who, in Ancient Greece, observed phenomena at first-hand, reflected, and discussed with others to advance his knowledge.

Dewey, in attempting to formulate a philosophy of progressive education as opposed to traditional education, outlined the differences. In imposing from above, traditional education:
– depends on external discipline and learning from texts and teachers
– ensures acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill and rote learning
– prepares for a remote future
– functions on the basis of static aims and materials.

In contrast, progressive education:
– cultivates and expresses individuality
– encourages free activity and learning from experience
– views the acquisition of skills as a means of attaining desired ends
– makes the most of the opportunities of the present
– comes to terms with and embraces a changing world.

Dewey concludes:

> 'I take it that the fundamental unity of the newer philosophy is found in the idea that there is **an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education.**' (our emphasis)

What is meant by the term **'traditional education'**? Essentially, Dewey is referring to cognitive and behavioural learning theories which underpin much of the education and training that is going on today – and not only in universities. Most para-professionals in developing countries are trained by the behavioural/cognitive method. Jones (1986) goes as far as to say that behaviourism dominates teacher education today.

Behavioural/cognitive methods deny any exercise of consciousness on the part of the learner or any contribution of subjective experience to the learning process. They ignore the affective dimension of learning, the **feelings** of the learner and concentrate on the

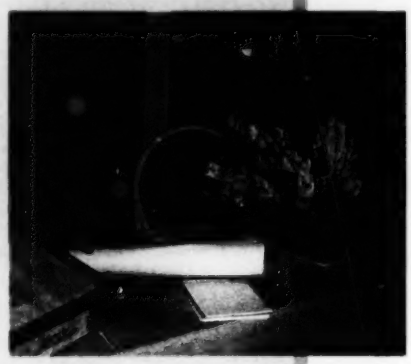
acquisition, manipulation and recall of abstract symbols. The learner acquires facts in isolation from other aspects of his/her life and regurgitates them in examinations. The assumptions behind these traditional methods of assessment of learning are that if students are able to regurgitate information, they are also able to diagnose and act upon it.

Jones (op cit) describes the aim of behaviour modification as the achievement of *'measurable changes in observable behaviour'* with *'reinforcers, positive and negative, employed to produce the behaviours that someone has defined as desirable and appropriate.'*

A good illustration of this concerns a student who had successfully completed her teacher training degree course in a college committed to experiential learning. She decided to undertake a social work training course. As this new training course worked to behavioural principles, she was distressed when she was penalised for introducing her own ideas into course work essays. She was informed quite categorically that if she wanted to get high marks on course work and examinations she should 'toe the line'.

In Chickering's (op cit) words, her learning should be:
'... synonymous with what one gleaned from books and college lectures, which are, for the most part, a regurgitation of still more books.'

This student made a conscious decision to give her tutors what they wanted, so that she could gain her professional diploma. However, she preserved her commitment to experiential learning when she became a manager and a trainer in her social work career.



Coleman (1976) has made a more measured comparison of traditional and experiential learning. He describes traditional classroom learning as *'information assimilation'* and sets out the steps in the process. These, in sequence, are:
- receiving information through a symbolic medium (books, lectures)
- assimilating and organising information to understand the principles (the point at which information becomes knowledge)
- ability to infer a particular application from a general principle
- movement from the cognitive to the sphere of action.

He describes the steps in experiential learning as being almost the reverse of the steps in traditional learning. The experiential learning steps are, in sequence:
- action and effects of action
- understanding these in the **particular** instance
- understanding that the general principles governing the particular instance may require further testing action
- application through action in new circumstances within the range of the generalisation.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Following Dewey, another major contribution to the development of experiential learning theory stemmed from the work of Kurt Lewin, who has had a profound influence on the discipline of social psychology and the field of organisational behaviour. A central theme for Lewin was the integration of theory and practice. He is remembered by his best known quotation, *'There is nothing so practical as a good theory'*. Lewin's work in the 1940s on group dynamics and his methodology of action research and laboratory training have now been widely adopted.

Many will remember the 1950s as the time when group dynamics was an important area of study. T-Groups ('T' stands for training) emerged as the most important and dramatic illustration of group dynamics. In brief, T-Groups were training programmes which started with group discussions and decision-making activities. They were non-hierarchical, i.e. staff and students related to each other as peers. Research and training staff observed interactions and recorded the activities. The analysis of this data was done each evening by the staff, who felt that it would be too difficult for students to be involved in discussion of their own behaviour. However, as some students asked to be involved in the analysis, it was eventually recognised that the real value of the training was found in a shared focus on actual behaviour and its discussion and analysis. As Kolb puts it:

> 'Thus the discovery was made that learning is best facilitated in an environment where there is dialectic tension and conflict between immediate, concrete experience and analytic detachment.'

Underlying the action research and laboratory training approach were Lewin's circle or feedback concept and learning process. This consisted of:
- concrete experience
- observation and reflection
- formation of abstract concepts and generalisations
- testing of the implications of the concepts in new situations
- feeding back again to concrete experience.

This is very similar to Coleman's (op cit) steps in experiential learning.

No doubt the 'Lewin' stage in the evolution of experiential learning theory with its emphasis on 'scientific' and 'research' methods gave some reassurance to doubters, followed as it was by Jean Piaget's theory on how children learn. Piaget challenged the belief that intelligence is an innate, internal characteristic of the individual; he believed that intelligence is shaped by experience and that learning arises from the interaction of the individual with his environment.

According to Piaget, the stages in the child's development:
- begin with concrete actions of feeling and touching
- proceed to reflection and the conversion of actions into images
- go on to give shape to experiences by drawing on concepts formed
- test the implications of the theories with concrete action.

In simple practice terms, this meant that in many schools the teaching of mathematics no longer depended on the learning of tables by rote. Instead the teacher provided experiential activities. From experiments with cuisennaire rods, water and beakers and feathers and sand, the child began to learn concepts of length, volume and weight.

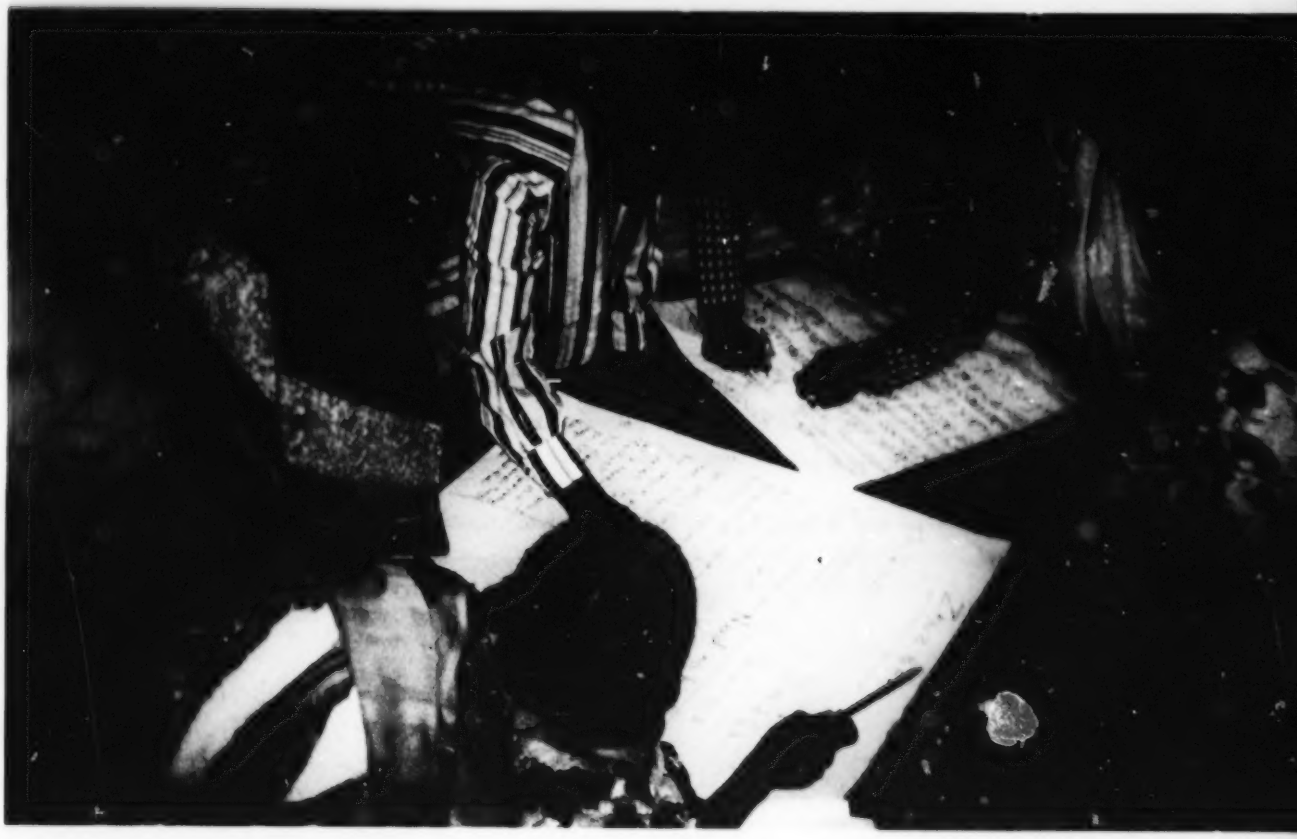
The similarities between Piaget's and Lewin's theories are obvious. The main difference is that the former applied them to children's learning while the latter applied them to adult learning. In addition, there was a greater emphasis on cognitive learning in the work of Piaget.

Another important element in experiential learning theory is the **affective dimension**. In outlining the elements of traditional learning theories, it was noted that such learning theories ignore the feelings of learners. The affective dimension was placed firmly into experiential learning by notable theorists and practitioners in the field of psychoanalysis, counselling and psychotherapy, among them Carl Jung, Carl Rogers, Fritz Perls and Abraham Maslow. They brought to the theory the concept that the healthily adapted adult and therefore the effective learner is one in whom the cognitive and affective processes are successfully integrated. This learner's emotional development keeps pace with his or her social development throughout the life cycle.

The final contributors to experiential learning theory to be briefly considered in this historical overview are the 'radical educators', Paulo Freire (1974) and Ivan Illich (1972). The former had his greatest influence in Latin America, the latter in the USA and the UK. Both Freire and Illich see traditional teaching and learning methods as instruments of repression, a means of social control.

Central to Freire's work with peasants in Latin America is the dialectic between abstract concepts and subjective personal experience. Through dialogue between ordinary people and facilitators, in which all are equal, the experiences of everyday life are studied. Their underlying meanings are explored, abstract concepts are created and freedom for action follows.

Illich embraces similar theories to Freire but applies them to young people and college students in the industrialised world. As his view is that no real learning takes place in educational institutions, he calls for the 'de-schooling' of society.



THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Experiential learning and the concept of knowledge

Kolb (1984) and Chickering (1977) put forward theories of experiential learning which, while firmly rejecting traditional behavioural/cognitive learning models, do not minimise the importance of the cognitive dimension in learning.

Avalos (1991) takes a similar stance in relation to teacher education. She suggests that there are three types of teaching theory:
- behavioural
- teacher as facilitator
- interactive.

Her favoured type is the interactive. She says:

> 'An interactionist approach will focus less on prescribed doses of content and more on the processes by which a student teacher converts these into personal knowledge.'

Kolb provides us with a definition of learning:

> 'Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.'

He goes on to point out the importance of this definition for experiential learning theory. He emphasises:

> '... the process of adaptation and learning as opposed to content or outcomes ...' shows that '... knowledge is a transformation process, being continuously created and recreated, not an independent entity to be acquired and transmitted ... and it indicates that '... learning transforms experience in both its objective and subjective forms.'

Keeton (1982) has a simpler definition:

> 'Experiential learning is defined as learning in which the learner is in direct touch with the realities being studied.'

Some questions need to be asked about Keeton's use of the word 'direct' and his use of the present tense. Experience (realities) can be defined in two ways in the context of experiential learning. Our own terms for these two forms of experience are **'natural'** and **'constructed'**. The one refers to the experience gained from life which precedes the reality to be studied, while the other refers to the structured experiences which may be an integral part of the study.

For example, the student of child development may bring to that study experience of rearing his or her own child. In addition, during the study/training period, he/she may be required to undertake an in-depth study of one particular child in a school or day care centre. Both **experiences** contribute to the learning process. On this premise, Keeton's definition ought to read '... ***is or has been in direct touch*** ...'.

Kolb asserts strongly that:

> '... to understand learning we must understand the nature of knowledge and vice versa.'

He goes on to analyse knowledge in a scholarly and complex way. To paraphrase his theory, experiential learning is seen by him as a four-stage cycle (Coleman's learning steps and Lewin's feedback concept) involving four adaptive learning modes:

- concrete experience
- reflective observation
- abstract conceptualisation
- active experimentation.

From this starting point, Kolb develops his theory stating that the four modes identified above produce four different learning processes. In turn, these combine to produce four different kinds of knowledge. He then goes on to analyse people's learning styles according to which types of knowledge and learning processes they employ and feel most comfortable using.

Kolb uses this structure to show that the learning process is not identical for all human beings. Individual learning styles can be illustrated by the emphasis that the learner places on the four elements of the cycle. It is important to note that Kolb sees **no hierarchical distinction between different learning styles**. Most people develop learning styles that emphasise some learning abilities over others, as we all have some weak and some strong points.

The highest level of learning or a hypothetical 'perfect learner' would have a combination of all four learning styles. Perhaps the most important point for us is that in Kolb's words:

> 'Early educational experiences shape individual learning styles: we are taught how to learn.' (our emphasis)

Kolb goes further on the issue of the validity of different kinds of knowledge. He talks of *personal* knowledge and social knowledge. The former is a combination of apprehension of experience and the socially acquired comprehension which one uses to explain the experience. The latter, (sometimes described as 'external' knowledge), is 'an independant, socially transmitted network of words, symbols and images, based solely on comprehension'. Kolb reminds us that, in the learning situation, personal and social knowledge are closely linked:

'Knowledge does not exist solely in books, mathematical formulae or philosophical systems; it requires active learners to interact with, interpret and elaborate these systems.'

Unfortunately:

'The modern tendency is to embrace the comprehension pole of the knowledge dialectic and to view with suspicion the intuitions of subjective experience.'

A final quotation from Kolb is most relevant:

'In this emerging information society, severe alienation can result when there is incongruity between personal knowledge and social knowledge. This is illustrated most dramatically by the alienation of the poor, whose street-wise way of learning doesn't fit with the symbolic/technological knowledge of the university; or, more subtly, it is illustrated by the creative writer who is 'turned off' by the pedantic critical climate of her English literature department, or the adult who returns to college and finds little recognition for a lifetime of learning by experience.'

This quotation raises important questions about the implications of experiential learning for different cultures, for different social classes within a society and for adult learning.

Cultural differences and experiential learning

Kolb sees the problem for 'the poor' as one of alienation, or: '[the] ... *incongruity between personal knowledge and social knowledge*'. Faundez (1988) goes further in his emphasis on the link between knowledge and power. In his view, society is imbued with:

'an ideology of domination that underestimates popular knowledge and overestimates scientific knowledge'.

He believes that ownership of scientific/social knowledge is in the hands of the educated, the prosperous and ultimately the people of 'developed' countries. The uneducated or those with limited formal education, the poor and the people of developing countries are seen to possess only what is viewed as inferior personal/popular knowledge.

Faundez sees the key to change as being in the hands:

'of a **new kind** of intellectual ... a technician and an animator all in one.'

This new kind of intellectual should be responsible for:

'the transfer of scientific and theoretical knowledge ... through permanent dialogue with the people.'

Thus '*the people*' will '*grasp*' and make their own, the knowledge that is created by the fusion of personal and social knowledge. They will move towards transformation of their own lives, after reflecting on and active experimenting with the knowledge they have created.

According to Faundez, the '*new intellectual*' will not dominate those who are considered '*ignorant*' by using '*the authoritative act of speech*' which is the prerogative of those who own knowledge and power. They have the culture of speech, while the '*ignorant*' have the culture of silence and '*must listen to the "truth" and receive the knowledge transmitted by him "who knows."*'

Recognition of the arguments about the ownership of knowledge is important for those who work in the development field, and the use of experiential learning approaches indicates a valuing of personal knowledge and a recognition of it as an essential complement to social knowledge. There are, however, other implications of introducing experiential learning approaches in different cultural contexts.

For example, teaching and learning in most developing countries are highly dependent on the traditional modes outlined earlier. Barkatoolah (1990) puts it this way:

> 'there is a tendency to concentrate primarily on teaching them [teacher trainees] didactic capabilities and skills so that they can take up their functions efficaciously, to the detriment of the teacher as a person with all the interior resources and potential he has amassed and which he can call upon in his work.'

Barkatoolah believes that this tendency accounts for low self-esteem among teachers in developing countries and high turnover, especially in rural areas.

At the same time, Wilson et al (1989) make the point that if the learning experience directly confronts the belief system of the learner, then he or she will not learn.

The problem is that learners in developing countries have been **taught how to learn**. They believe that formality, distance and passivity are essential elements in learning. Experiential learning is not trusted precisely because it lacks these elements.

Kolb confronts this dilemma:

> 'One's job as an educator is not only to implant new ideas but also to dispose of or modify old ones. In many cases, resistance to new ideas stems from their conflict with old beliefs that are inconsistent with them. If the education process **begins** by bringing out the learner's beliefs and theories, examining and testing them and then integrating the new, more refined ideas into the person's belief systems, the learning process will be facilitated.' (our emphasis)

Academics who support traditional learning styles often stress that experiential learning approaches are only suitable for those who cannot aspire to what they see as higher levels of learning.

Gartner (1976) makes the point that:

> 'Experiential learning is a mode of learning more amenable to the realities of the lives of those who have been excluded from the traditional model.'

Gartner was writing as one committed to the experiential learning mode, but the danger is that experiential learning is seen as **only** appropriate for the restricted group Gartner refers to. If that view were accepted, it would preserve the hierarchies of learning referred to earlier. However, many of the exponents of experiential learning (Kolb, Keeton, Chickering et al) make a point of relating their ideas firmly to university teaching and learning, as they are highly critical of their own academic milieus.

Concern that experiential learning should not be seen as appropriate only for those of limited formal education also applies to adult education. Yet the eminent suitability of experiential learning approaches to adult education should not be minimised.

Adult learning and adult learners

> 'It was once thought that the best years of life for learning were over by the time a person had reached intermediate school. But this springs from a conception of learning as an assimilation of information rather than as the transformation of experience into ever more maturing insights and the development of the self into an ever more responsive and responsible participant in a mutually fulfilling society.' (Keeton 1976)

This quotation highlights the differences between **pedagogy** (literally, the art/science of teaching children) and **andragogy** (the art/science of teaching adults as adults and not as children).

Pedagogy is characterised by the following:
- inferior roles (children) and superior roles (teachers)
- the teacher is the central figure in the learning process
- the teacher gives and the pupils take
- the teacher's only responsibility is to teach and is thus absolved of responsibility for ensuring that **real learning** takes place.

Clearly the dependent role of children requires that the teacher should be in control. Nevertheless, many recognise that the more learner-centred approach of andragogy also applies to children. This accounts for the child-centred or learning by discovery approach which was fashionable in industrialised countries in the 1960s and which is still supported by many educationalists. Unfortunately, the opposing view is also prevalent, i.e. that adults should be taught by pedagogical methods.

Why is the pedagogical approach inappropriate? If we look at the characteristics of **andragogy**, we see that the emphasis is:
- on **learning** rather than on teaching
- that adult learners share responsibility with teachers for their own learning
- that adult learners are actively involved in the learning process
- and teachers of adults adopt a very different role from that of pedagogue.

The pedagogic approach is unsuitable for adult learners because it depends on the compulsory presence of the learners, though adults enter learning voluntarily and can withdraw at any time. Also, while the teacher's superiority depends on age, experience and knowledge, adult learners also have a great deal of knowledge and experience from previous learning and practice. Finally, we cannot assume passivity on the part of the learners. Adults have developed opinions and beliefs which prepare them for dialogue, not for acceptance of a passive, receiving role.

Nevertheless, adults, like children, often enter a learning situation with uncertainty and trepidation. Many of them have already been accustomed to a pedagogic approach which has deflated their self-image. Since their present self-image derives from their experience, their profession, their achievements and their social roles and status, their self-regard will be shaken if the new learning situation does not build on this experience. Stanley (1987) puts the point strongly:

> 'They [adult learners] tend to place great value on their experience and can be quite "touchy" if it is ignored or its worth minimised; they feel affronted, slighted, ignored, insulted.'

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

This relationship between theory and practice is illustrated by the following example provided by the author of this paper:

A language teacher was among a group of experienced secondary school teachers attending a course in Pastoral Care and Counselling at a college of education. They were all preparing to take on new pastoral roles in addition to their subject teaching. In a personal tutorial at the beginning of the course, the language teacher showed herself to be a dedicated traditional teacher, though with a 'caring' attitude.

Her personal life was ordered and stable, she was married but without children of her own. The problem was that her new pastoral care duties, as Head of the Fourth Year (14-15 years old), would require her to work with pupils across four streams of descending ability. As she had previously worked only with academically oriented children, she naturally, felt a high level of anxiety. The pastoral care course had a practical placement at its core. To enable participants to develop new skills in their own work situations, they were all placed in their own schools for one day per week during the full-time course. On her placement, the language teacher was asked to run a group at her school for a small number of persistent truants, (children who frequently failed to attend school without the knowledge of their parents). She would have an open agenda to learn more about these truants and their interests.

Preparation and support for placements was dealt with on both an individual and group basis. As adults, the 'students' in her group had as much, if not more, to offer each other than had the tutor. The language teacher, for example, was already 'engaging with contradictory circumstances', as the 'problem' of relating to different and difficult pupils was newly 'created and posed'.

Each week of the placement, 'a dialogic and reflective processing of the experience' took place with the tutor and the group. As a result, the teacher learned and grew in her role, facing her pastoral responsibilities with greater understanding and increased confidence. Best of all, she learned to relate differently and effectively to pupils with methods which she could also use in the future in her language teaching role.

Stanley indicates a more active form of opposition to pedagogy among adult learners. Frequently the result is increased passivity, an acceptance of 'teacher knows best' and little or no real learning.

Andragogy, in contrast, seeks to give the learner control of his own learning in line with his personal motivation. Barkatoolah (1990) explains:

> 'The adult will be more inclined to change or to learn on the basis of **how he wants** to grow and change rather than on objectives fixed by others and out of his control.'

The adult's learning will begin when his experience and status are valued. Barkatoolah again:

> 'Today, in fact, it is thought that the adult learns better when the matter being learned or the methods used can be linked to his previous experience and that this experience can be reinvested in the new learning process. It is also thought that learning by an adult is more a matter of transforming past experience (re-organisation of his ideas, his values, etc.) than of training (i.e. the acquisition of knowledge).'

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

It has already been suggested that andragogy requires a different kind of 'teacher' from the one who uses pedagogical methods. Stanley (op cit) describes the adult educator as *'a procedural technician, resource person and co-enquirer'*. Wilson et al (op cit) suggest five main functions for the adult educator committed to experiential approaches to education:
- understanding the personal and social history of the individual
- arranging the learning environment to promote experiential learning
- preparing learners to engage with contradictory circumstances
- creating and posing problems to be resolved
- facilitating dialogue and reflection on the learning experience.

Theory and practice

The example in the box on page 15 presents another important aspect of experiential learning: the relationship between theory and practice. In this case 'practice' refers to 'constructed' experience (see earlier discussion of 'natural' and 'constructed' experience). Ideally, training practice (or the practicum) gives students an opportunity to:
- experience the reality of the profession/job for which they are preparing
- undergo that experience in a challenging and supportive situation
- be able to reflect and discuss the experience
- see clearly the connections between the practice and the theoretical parts of the training.

At worst, the practicum gives only lip-service to the value of practice. It is included because it is expected, but consists only of observation rather than providing an active role for the student. It is seen as having only tenuous connections with the theoretical part of the training.

In fact, in the majority of training courses, the emphasis in training is on theory. This is despite the fact that entrants to professions often complain that their training has given them inadequate preparation to actually do the job for which they are being trained. A magazine article by John Collee (1990), a British doctor, illustrates the point:

> 'In reality your medical training begins after you graduate. You learn medicine through a kind of apprenticeship – working for hours under close supervision until the basic skills become second nature ... I can't help thinking that the tremendously long theoretical training is partly for show – designed specifically to make medicine look difficult and therefore to increase the intellectual status of doctors in society.'

In discussing teacher training, Jones (1986) suggests another explanation for the emphasis on theory. In her view, 'behaviourism dominates' teacher training as the training always aims to measure changes in behaviour. Jones argues that the ability to learn abstract theory can be **measured**. Teachers work rigidly to a course curriculum which they plan and deliver. Examinations then test the students' abilities to recall what they have absorbed or, too frequently, learned by rote. While practice is less easy to measure, attempts have been made to make practice conform to behavioural principles, for example, by requiring students to produce 'model' lesson plans.

These are not arguments for dispensing with theory or assessment in training. However, an important point emerges. **Although the terms are frequently used synonymously, training and education are not the same**. Stanley (op cit) sees learning as the critical factor in both but defines education as:

'... concerned with cognitive learning or the assimilation of knowledge or concepts which may or may not be of immediate use. Training, on the other hand, though making use of concepts and principles, is behavioural and involves practice for developing expertise.'

The OXFAM Handbook (1985) states:

'Training should not be confused with or be a substitute for education. Training has narrower, more immediate goals, related to enabling people to acquire specific skills which are usually transferable into work or leisure activities.'

Whilst concurring with aspects of both these definitions, we suggest our own definition:

Training is a process which enables people to acquire skills, knowledge and understanding that relate and transfer to their own particular roles and tasks now or in the future.

By focusing on understanding as well as on skills and knowledge, this definition embraces the principles of experiential and adult education already discussed. By including knowledge as well as skills, it avoids the narrowness of the OXFAM definition and indicates the importance of the relationship between theory and practice.

We need to remind ourselves again of the two kinds of knowledge and the two kinds of practice analysed in this paper:

- 'external' knowledge (from books and lectures)
- knowledge created in experiential learning from the analysis of practice
- 'natural' practice drawn from personal and social experience
- 'constructed' practice to give the learner experience of reality (the practicum).

While the most effective learning and training result from a merging of all four aspects, training courses frequently contain only 'external' knowledge (theory) and practicum. To make matters worse, the two are often detached with an imbalance in favour of theory, as in the earlier description of medical training.

The separation of theory and practice in training manifests itself in several ways:

- Training courses are usually constructed in 'blocks' with a period of time (varying with the different professions/levels) spent in colleges or universities followed by a period of practice in the field. Blocks are usually designed to fit in with the programme of the theory teachers and the institution rather than on the basis of good educational principles.
- Theory teachers are usually not the teachers/tutors who actually supervise practice. In some cases the two groups have little or no contact with each other.
- Group sessions for the analysis of practice, though essential, are often not planned or time-tabled in the training programme or are included in an *ad hoc* rather than an integrated way.

The last point is important. Achieving effective integration of theory and practice would require major change to put practice at the centre of the training process. Theory would therefore cease to be a separate part of the process and would be used **when and where required to illuminate practice**. But many trainers are likely to resist such a radical shift.

We conclude this section on theory and practice with a quotation from Faundez (op cit):

> 'To learn well ... calls for not only an intellectual but also a practical effort, thanks to which the abstract – which is part of reality – permits one to penetrate the concrete and vice versa. In this pedagogical (sic) and cultural process, it is necessary to pass from ... 'opinion' to comprehension. This is done through a theoretical and practical process in which the abstract clarifies the concrete and, inversely, allows one to discover theoretical-practical reality and to transform it'.

Difficulties in experiential learning

We have presented a positive view of experiential learning. But experiential learning has its critics, including some from the field of management training, despite the latter's relatively warm embrace of this approach. Green and Tabor (1978) argue:

> 'despite its promises, experiential learning has a number of difficulties which rob it of its full meaning'.

They make two main points. As experiential learning is often enjoyable, students frequently view it as a game and therefore fail to reflect on it in the critical way required for effective learning. This is a curiously puritanical argument.

Next, they argue that most students do not have sufficiently developed observation skills to know what to look for in experience. Moreover, experiential learning is often non-integrative and non-programmatic. They state:

> 'All of these problems serve to weaken the reflective observation phase of learning, thereby diminishing students' ability to develop abstract concepts, to relate the course experiences to other concepts, and to generalise to real-life situations'.

In these arguments Green and Tabor appear to have underestimated the potential of students and the role of the trainer as facilitator. They do not appear to recognise that trainers have a responsibility to help develop the observation skills of the students and to create opportunities for critical reflection. Trainers also need to construct with students a learning environment which fits both the students' own experience and the training objectives.

The solutions suggested by Green and Tabor to the problems they pose clearly indicate that they are trying to make experiential learning fit traditional behaviourist approaches to ensure predictability. House (1978) agrees with the objective of predictability and argues that:

> 'lack of predictability results in confusion on the part of students and the feeling that they have wasted their time'.

Many students favour experiential learning, but some remain critical, viewing it with impatience. While they may simply have different learning styles, we should note that these styles are usually the result of traditional teaching.

The existence of different learning styles should not discourage trainers from using experiential learning approaches. Different learning styles only indicate an **emphasis** in that person on a particular way of learning. If trainers seek to discover and understand the 'personal and social history' of the learner, this would include identification of learning

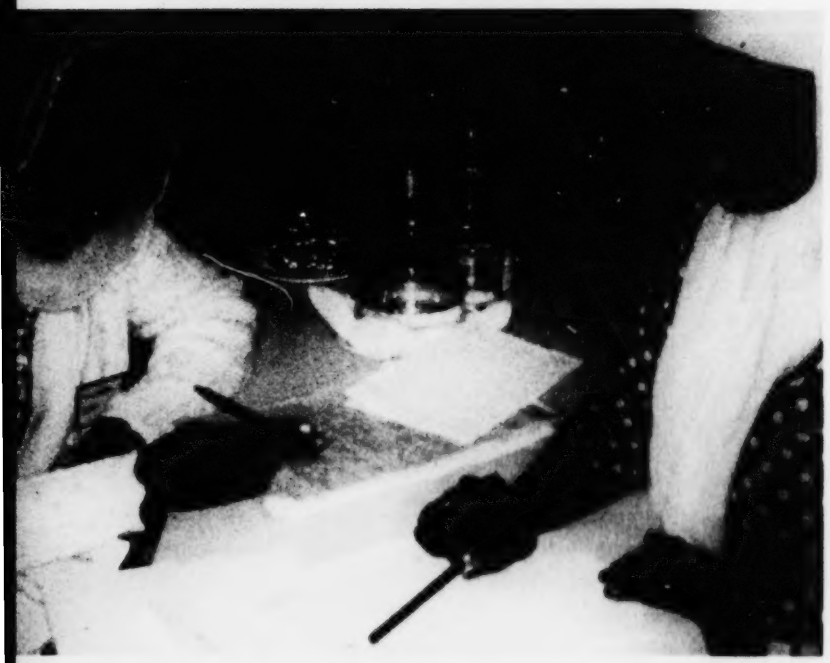
styles. It would then be possible to *'construct with them an appropriate learning environment'* (Wilson op cit).

The fact that people are 'taught how to learn' presents difficulties for trainers who want to use experiential learning approaches. Since most adult learners have been taught to learn by traditional methods, they tend to believe that learning consists of instruction by the teacher, the absorption of knowledge and the ability to recall facts in the examination room. Given this view, experiential learning approaches will not constitute 'real' learning.

To be effective, an experiential learning approach to training demands a particular kind of trainer – a facilitator. Therefore, facilitators should also be trained in experiential learning methodology. But the same attitudes identified above in relation to students also apply to the training of trainers. That is why we have addressed these issues in a training pack for trainers.

Chickering (op cit) is clearly aware of other difficulties for trainers:

> 'The role of expert may be deeply satisfying. Preparing thoroughly and maintaining strict control may provide security, recognition and a sense of achievement very hard to relinquish. Why should I get to know practitioners and spend time talking about their problems? Why should I encourage a situation in which students may introduce new considerations that simply distract me and the class from the theoretical complexities that are so satisfying and worthwhile? These concrete experiences and practical applications may be well and good and may eventually be necessary – but not now, not for my students, not for me to deal with.'



A further argument is put by Smith (1988), from the field of management training. He favours the expert lecture on the grounds that this methodology gives high credibility to training and saves a great deal of time. But experiential learning does not exclude the use of lectures. It permits appropriate introduction of abstract theory when theory can illuminate practice. Experiential learning is working effectively when, in Chickering's words:

'... students recognise that words in print (and those from the mouths of experts) are not absolute truths but are instead one person's particular organisation of reality.'

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN ACTION

Training the trainers

We have discussed experiential learning as an effective learning method for all levels of ability, from infant education to post-graduate university education.

We now concentrate on the application of experiential learning principles and practice to the training of trainers, particularly trainers preparing others to work with or care for young children. This includes parents, para-professionals or professionals in development programmes, particularly in developing countries.

Training adults is a major focus of many development programmes. The adult learners described above are all being trained in the care and development of young children. But their training role does not, of course, stop there. Whenever parents and communities are involved in ECCD (Early Childhood Care and Development), those who work directly with children are also expected to be able to work confidently with the adults who surround the child. This paper is, therefore, focused on training adults in an appropriate methodology.

Early childhood development

This paper has as its content focus, Early Childhood Development. There is an important reason for using active experiential methods in training those who work with young children. Such methods are likely to produce workers who think for themselves, who are creative and imaginative and who have learned the value of interaction in the learning process. In turn, they are more likely to work with young children and families in a way which reflects their training. The result will be children who learn better, because their developmental needs are understood. Their language skills will develop more quickly through improved interaction with caring adults.

In many developing countries, adults are trained as pre-school teachers with traditional pedagogic methods. The results are predictable. Pre-school classrooms are always arranged with 'corners', each devoted to another aspect of children's development: the art corner, the building corner, the reading corner, etc. Once they have arranged these 'corners', pre-school teachers frequently become passive observers of the children's activities. Crucial interaction is lacking between the adult caregivers and the children.

In the training of these teachers, the emphasis was on the **theory** of child development. Its practical application was dealt with in a way which allowed no questioning. Trainees have been taught that there is only one way to arrange a classroom. An example from one of the authors of this paper indicates how individual creativity and imagination in the training of pre-school teachers are discouraged

> 'On one mission to a developing country, I was asked to act as a kind of impromptu external examiner of the work of students completing a pre-school teachers' training course. The trainer was trying hard to ensure the course had a practical component, so each trainee had made toys and learning equipment for the children to use. Every trainee had made exactly the same collection of objects. When asked why, the trainer said that if they all made different things, it would be very difficult to give marks for their efforts.'

This is a perfect example of behaviourism taken to its limits.

Although trainees in developing countries may have low levels of **formal education**, they often have high levels of creativity and imagination, strong oral traditions and understanding of children's needs. All of these provide an ideal base for training to work with children. These qualities are the very ones which can be drawn on through active experiential training methods. It is both sad and wasteful to ignore these qualities in order to facilitate assessment.

However, development programmes in ECD (Early Childhood Development) are frequently described as offering **alternative** ways of providing care and education for young children. They are therefore in a position to try out new ways of training.

Experts on primary education in developing countries struggle with many problems: the low status and high turnover of teachers, high pupil drop-out rates, poverty, education of the girl child and lack of parental interest in schooling. Linking these problems to the **training** of primary school teachers, some experts are critical of behaviourist and mechanistic approaches. They realise that they lead to mechanistic approaches in the classroom. In a policy paper prepared in 1991 for the Commonwealth Secretariat on the subject of *Approaches to Teacher Education: Initial Teacher Training*, Beatrice Avalos said:

> 'Much of primary school teaching ... remains teacher-centred talking, with mechanistic forms of pupil participation, emphasis on "labelling" and "nominalism", and with little provision of help to children experiencing learning difficulties.'

She refers in her study to research into methods of teaching in primary schools and their relationship to teacher training in Colombia, Bolivia, Thailand, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and many other countries.

Changing the training of primary school teachers is difficult because primary education is bound up with the formal school system. It is much easier to carry out experiments in the training of teachers and workers in early childhood care and development as it is part of the non-formal system. Successful experiments in the training of early childhood workers in the participatory experiential mode could have great potential influence on the formal system. There are examples in projects supported by the Foundation of teachers in primary schools seeking training from ECD trainers, having recognised the advantages which flow from working in this mode.

Some problems in introducing new training methods

Introducing participatory experiential training methods into the field presents a number of problems. One is the **self perpetuating nature of learning**. In other words, adults have been taught how to learn in the early days of their schooling. This almost certainly means that they were taught in the traditional pedagogic way. When the same methods are used at a later learning stage (for example, when adults are trained to work in an early childhood centre or to become a parent educator), their responses can include anger, withdrawal or passivity.

Much depends on the level of confidence in these adults when entering the training. The level of confidence is predictably lowest in those who have failed or dropped out of the formal system, including many of those in ECD programmes in developing countries.

To cope with this problem, experiential methods have been used in many parent education initiatives which form part of these programmes. These methods have been very successful. Evaluation of these initiatives have found positive results for parents: improved personal confidence, growth of knowledge and understanding, and development of collective approaches to problems.

In looking at experiential methods in training of pre-school teachers, the main problem is one of **credibility**. If these teachers are employed by Ministries of Education, training standards must reach a certain level. That level is determined in relation to existing teacher training programmes. In other words, pre-school teacher training programmes must resemble primary teacher training programmes as much as possible, with an emphasis on theory to provide academic credibility. Even when pre-school teachers are employed by communities/parents, academic credibility is sought to ensure status.

The credibility problem has another aspect. Many projects in both developed and developing countries attempt to increase the status and financial rewards of early

childhood workers by obtaining accreditation from local universities. In negotiating with universities to gain recognition (Certificates and Diplomas) for aspects of Child Care/ECD/EC Education, project organisers encounter problems which are central to this discussion.

Even when negotiations succeed and an accredited course is set up, often the rate of student drop-out is high in the first year(s). This appears to correlate with the strong theoretical focus of the early parts of many university approved courses, which are frequently taught in the university itself. This focus may discourage experienced workers in the early childhood field. They are being introduced to the theoretical underpinning of the work that many have been involved in for years, **without reference to that experience.** This often makes adult learners feel that they have arrived on the course knowing nothing. Naturally this can result in a dramatic drop in their self-confidence.

Large numbers of children present another challenge to participatory methods. In many countries there are large numbers of children in centres, schools and day care situations. If workers are trained in a methodology which emphasises the understanding of individual backgrounds and learning needs and the importance of interaction, how can they effectively use this methodology in a class of 80?

A final problem – but a major opportunity – is concerned with the **training of trainers.** In order for experiential learning methods to work well, the cycle of 'being taught to learn' must be broken. Ideally this would occur by focusing on the **initial training level.** When those trained in experiential methods move through the levels of the system and eventually become a new generation of trainers themselves, the cycle may be broken.

However, in-service training is very effective, particularly in the short term and here it is important to target those top level trainers who have great influence on training in their respective countries. In this paper we concentrate on this level of training of trainers.

Relating methodology to current practice

The problems outlined above are real and daunting. Therefore, trainers must be sensitive to all the adverse attitudes. Trainers in the early childhood field, who will be training those who train both professionals and para-professionals to work directly with children, parents and communities, **should not attempt too much too soon.** Trainers should set a realistic pace for introducing experiential methods.

For example, as a trainer you must first decide whether to take on the role of facilitator rather than traditional teacher. The role of traditional teacher or trainer allows you to keep a certain distance from your trainees and gives you a clear structure to which you can work with satisfaction. It also provides you with the status of expert. If you are

satisfied that your present methods of training result in a good pass rate for your trainees in their final tests and also result in children receiving much more than custodial care – then you may see no reason to change your methods.

If, however, you feel less satisfied, then you may wish to try out some learning activities which encourage active involvement by trainees in the content area of child development and which draw on trainees' own experience. These activities should help trainers and trainees to get the most benefit from the practicum and at the same time, should draw on the theory of child development.

There are many examples of participatory learning activities in the training pack published by the Bernard van Leer Foundation and UNESCO *Enhancing the Skills of Early Childhood Trainers*. This pack can be obtained from UNESCO at the address given on the inside front cover.

There is an important caveat. Such activities are designed to be used by a trainer who is prepared to be a facilitator. This means a trainer should see the self-development of the trainee as one of the main training objectives. This would be in terms of:
- building up self-confidence
- encouraging initiative and creativity rather than conformity
- posing questions rather than giving answers
- giving appropriate support in the practice part of the training.

Trainers may want to go beyond these activities. They could even try to design their own training course using experiential methods. The following points may help.

1. **Make a decision that practice will be the focus of your training.** Start with the practice and then build your theory around it. The theory will emerge from practice. Practice includes:
   - trainees' existing practice in relating to and understanding young children in their everyday lives ('natural' practice);
   - the practical placement that they will undertake as part of the course, or their present practice as a worker in an EC Centre, a child minder, a village health worker, or a trainer of any of these ('constructed' practice).

   Your task as a trainer will be to use both these forms of practice in the development of the trainee.

2. **Begin with a diagnostic approach.** Find out as much as possible about the individual trainee.
   - Talk to each of them about their experiences as mothers, sisters and as children themselves. You can show you value these experiences by drawing on them during the training.
   - If they are already workers in ECD, discuss their experiences and discover what they see as their strengths.
   - Discuss as well, the weaknesses they want to change into strengths.
   - Consider with them the possibility of using their present work situation to set up a supervised and supported practicum.

- Make early group sessions an opportunity to get to know each other, to share expectations and self-doubt, to share experience and to build self-confidence and trust in other group members as well as the facilitator.
- Plan activities which develop observation skills.

3. **Avoid beginning courses with theory.** Theory frequently serves to make trainees feel ignorant and thus reduces confidence. Instead, introduce it as the need and opportunity arises. Group sessions for analysis and reflection on practice provide an ideal context for bringing in relevant theory. Practice supervision and support provide another setting to bring in theory.

   If you are not confident enough about your methods to do this, avoid blocks of theory followed by blocks of practice. Instead, either have a block of practice followed by a block of theory or find some way to intersperse the two.

4. **Use analysis of practice as the basis of your group training sessions.**
   Discuss in the group what has happened in practice and think about how things might have been done differently. Were there alternatives? Discuss what trainees have observed about individual children or what they have learned in seeing how other adults relate to children.

   If you do not feel confident enough to put these topics into a theoretical context, you could arrange to have a group session in which relevant theory is introduced. The group can discuss the theory and whether or not it has illuminated their practice.

In one developing country, guidelines were recently being developed for trainers who would be involved in training facilitators to work in the parent education field. As background to this, some research had been done on local child rearing practices. These had been classed as positive, negative and neutral practices. In guidelines relating to the development of babies 0-3 months, all these practices were included. However, in the methodology section, it was suggested that all the practices should form the basis of discussion with the facilitators in training.

In this way, instead of the facilitator, and ultimately the parent, being told that a particular practice was wrong – because it was harmful to the baby – the point could be raised in the form of questions. For example, facilitators would ask why some mothers try to stretch their babies' legs. They know the reason: the mothers are afraid that the baby's legs will not grow straight since babies frequently draw their legs up to the 'womb' position. The mother's answer could lead to a discussion in which the facilitator could explain that the baby's movements and development are natural and that the body and limbs are fragile.

Positive practices should always be commented on and even used as starting points for discussion of more negative practices. For example, some mothers in the same culture as above, put fine gauze over the faces of their babies to protect them from the sun. Yet, when the children are a little older, the same mothers are so protective of them that they keep them indoors and the health of the children suffers from lack of sunlight. Here a positive practice can be linked with a negative practice to bring out the learning points.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

5. **Encourage peer support.** As the training proceeds, greater trust among trainees should help them to reflect on practice with each other. Promote sharing of ideas and experience in group sessions. If problems arise in practice, the trainees themselves can begin to support each other with ideas and encouragement. They can also confront and challenge each other about their work and practice.

6. **Spend time with trainees in their practice situation.** Although distances in developing countries may be an obstacle, remember that one day working alongside a trainee in her practice situation may be worth many days of theory. Try always to comment and build on the positive aspects of the trainee's work. If there are negative aspects, suggest alternative ways of working rather than dwelling on the negative.

7. **Be sensitive in your approach to cultural and traditional practices.** For example, in relation to child development, be clear which traditional practices have a positive effect on the child, which have a negative effect and which could be considered neutral. These issues will come up if you work in an experiential way. That is because the training is concerned not only with knowledge, understanding and skills development but with values and attitudes as well.

   If cultural practices are not dealt with sensitively, there will be a resistance to learning on the part of those whose culture seems to be threatened or attacked.

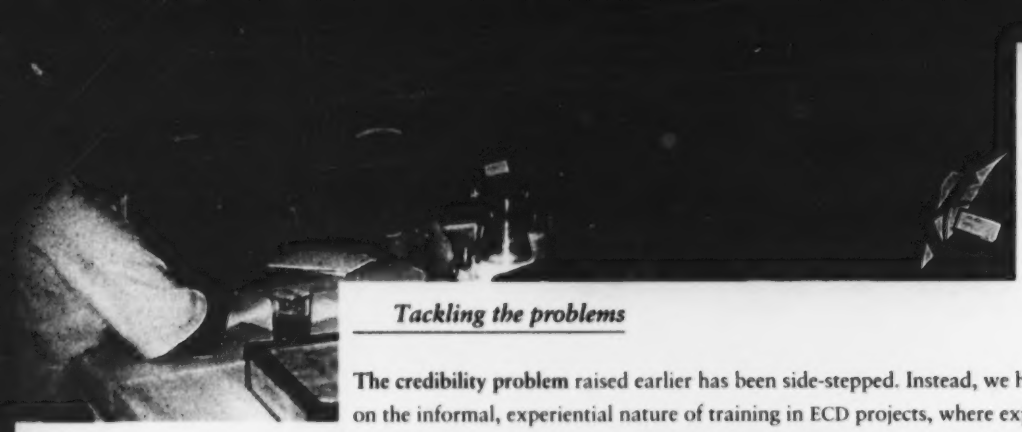
8. **Develop your own materials and activities** for participatory learning. Use training materials, like this pack, to get ideas on how to develop culturally relevant materials. Do not work mechanically through the listed activities – try to adapt them to your conditions.

   For example photographs, pictures and videos serve as effective learning tools since they raise discussion of child development issues. They will be doubly effective if the photographs are taken/the pictures drawn/the videos made in the community where the training is taking place. Visual materials are, of course, particularly effective in training those with literacy problems.

   The same is true of role play and simulation. These provide two of the best ways of conveying points in any situation. In cultures with strong oral traditions, these techniques are especially effective and culturally appropriate.

9. **Review the way you assess/examine your students' learning.** Exactly what are you assessing? If you are using written examinations, do the questions merely test the trainee's ability to memorise facts? Is this simply encouraging rote learning? If you are using experiential participatory methods which encourage trainees to question and to be creative and imaginative, then any assessment process will need to find ways of allowing them to exercise these qualities.

   For example, you might ask them specifically to draw on their practice experience in answering questions about child development. This once more underlines the importance of the link between theory and practice.



Tackling the problems

The credibility problem raised earlier has been side-stepped. Instead, we have concentrated on the informal, experiential nature of training in ECD projects, where experiential methods are most likely to be tried out. There is still a need to convince universities, colleges and ministries that participatory experiential learning approaches work, if accreditation and appropriate monetary reward are to be sought. Above all, evaluation of the effects by these methods and some comparison with traditional pedagogic training methods are needed.

However, while awaiting the results of any evaluation, we can draw attention to what we see as our successes. This could be, for example, in terms of observed improved development of children/parents who are the ultimate recipients of the effects of training programmes. We can also start to include in our training primary teachers and health workers who have expressed interest in new ways of working with children and families.

Coping with large numbers. Let us return to those teachers who have been trained in a way which encourages interaction with children – but who then have to cope with pre-school classes of 80 children. It would be too easy to say that a pre-school teacher who is committed to both the concept and the children, will manage somehow. In fact, there are pre-school teachers in developing countries who have warm and personal relationships with their young pupils, in spite of having to cope with large classes. But they need help – not only ideas but supportive personnel. In some developing countries, teachers with pre-school children are crammed into tiny classrooms while outside there is plenty of space. Often the mothers are nearby, doing minor tasks or waiting for their children. Why not involve them in the classroom?

Partnership with parents. We said earlier that in development programmes we are involved in adult education, preparing adults to work not only with young children but with parents and community members. In programmes centred on parent education, the approaches advocated are the only ones that will help and support parents in improving their parenting. In the most effective centre-based programmes, parent education is also a feature. But an additional step could be taken by these programmes in involving parents in the work of the centre itself. Experiential/participatory training for ECD workers in whatever the setting, should include methods of, and practice in working with parents. In this way parents can continue to be the educators of their own children and partners with those who work with children.

Conclusion

This paper has moved from a rationale for experiential learning to a discussion of training in general. Finally we have looked at training in early childhood development, particularly in developing countries.

This paper is based on a great deal of experience in using experiential participatory learning methods over many years. If it encourages readers to reflect and assess the methods they currently use and to try out the ideas, it will have succeeded.

References

Avalos, Beatrice (1991); Vol. 2: *Approaches to teacher education: Initial Teacher Training;* background policy paper commissioned for the Eleventh Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, Series editors: Rodwell, Susie and White, Richard.

Barkatoolah, Amina B.S. (1990); *Learning from Experience: A New Approach for Teacher Up-grading;* UNESCO Unit for Cooperation with UNICEF and WFP, Paris, France.

Chickering, Arthur W. (1977); *Experience and Learning: An Introduction to Experiential Learning;* Change Magazine Press, USA.

Coleman, James S. (1976); 'Differences between Experiential and Classroom Learning'; in Keeton, Morris T. and Associates, *Experiential Learning: Rationale, Characteristics and Assessment;* Jossey Bass Publishers, San Francisco.

Collee, Dr. J. (1990), *A Bogus Education* in 'A Doctor Writes' series; The Observer, London.

Dewey, John (1938); *Experience and Education;* Collier and Kappa Delta Pi, New York.

Faundez, A. (1988); *Participation in the Education Process;* Centre for the Study of Education in Developing Countries (CESO), The Hague, the Netherlands.

Gartner, Alan P. (1976); 'Credentialing the Disenfranchised' in Keeton, Morris T. and Associates, *Experiential Learning: Rationale, Characteristics and Assessment;* Jossey Bass Publishers, San Francisco.

Green, S.G. and Taber, T.D. (1978); *Structuring Experiential Learning through experimentation;* Academy of Management Review, Oct. 1978,3, 889-895.

House, Robert J. (1977); *Experiential Learning: A Sad Passing Fad?;* paper presented at the 1977 Organizational Behavior Teaching Conference, Toronto.

Jones, Elizabeth (1986); 'Perspectives on Teacher Education: Some Relations between Theory and Practice'; in *Current Topics in Early Childhood Education* Vol. VI, Ed. Lilian G. Katz, Albex Publishing Corporation, Norwood, New Jersey.

Keeton, Morris T. and Associates (1976); *Experiential Learning: Rationale, Characteristics and Assessment;* Jossey Bass Publishers, San Francisco.

Keeton, Morris T. (1982); 'Experiential Learning' from *Encyclopedia of Educational Research* 5th edition; Ed. Harold E. Mitzel, Free Press New York.

Kolb, David A. (1984;) *Experiential Learning;* Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

OXFAM Handbook (1985); Section 2 on Training p. 150-161, Publ. OXFAM, Oxford, U.K.

Smith, Peter (1988); *Second thoughts on action learning;* University of Manchester Institute for Development Policy and Management, Journal of European Industrial Training (JEIT) 12,6, University Press, Bradford.

Stanley, Lloyd A. (1987); *Guide to Training Curriculum Development;* ICPE Publications.

Wilson, Arthur L.; Burket, Lee (1989); *What makes learning meaningful?,* presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Bibliography

Bacchus, Kazim; Aziz, A.A.; Ahmad, S.H.; Bakar, F.A.; Rodwell, S.; (Sept 1991); *Volume I; Curriculum Reform; Background/Policy* paper commissioned for the Eleventh Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (Barbados, 29 Oct.- 2 Nov. 1990). Series Editors: Rodwell, Susie and White, Richard; Commonwealth Secretariat, Pall Mall, London, U.K.

Creciendo Unidos, *Journal of Centro Internacional de Educación y Desarrollo Humano* (CINDE) (1987), Approaches to Development and the Changing Role of the Educator; Bogotá, Colombia.

Casse, Pierre (1981); *Training for the Cross-Cultural Mind;* The Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research, Washington, D.C. (SETAR).

Freire, Paulo (1972); *Pedagogy of the Oppressed;* Penguin Education, England.

Hermann, S. and Korenich, M. (1977); *Authentic Management: A Gestalt Orientation to Organisations and their Development;* Addison-Wesley, Reading, Massachusetts.

Honey, Peter (1988); *You are what you learn;* Nursing Times, Sept. 7; Vol. 84 no. 36, London, U.K.

Illich, Ivan (1971); *De-Schooling Society;* Harper and Row, New York.

Houle, Cyril O. (1976), 'Deep Traditions of Experiential Learning' in Keeton, Morris T. and Associates, *Experiential Learning: Rationale, Characteristics and Assessment;* Jossey Bass Publishers, San Francisco.

King, Kenneth; Singh, Jasbir Sarjit; *Volume 3: Quality and Aid;* (Sept. 1991) Background/Policy paper commissioned for the Eleventh Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (Barbados 29 Oct.- 2 Nov. 1990); Series Editors: Rodwell, Susie; White, Richard; Commonwealth Secretariat, Pall Mall, London, U.K.

Kirkwood, Robert (1976); 'The Importance of Assessing Learning' in Keeton, Morris T. and Associates, *Experiential Learning: Rationale, Characteristics and Assessment;* Jossey Bass Publishers, San Francisco.

Ratnaike, Jayananda (1985) *Preparing to Help the Young Child Learn and Grow: Training ECCE Personnel;* UNESCO-UNICEF Co-operative Programme, Paris.

Ross, Eva (1989); 'Let's All Have Rubber Bands' in *Early Years,* Vol. 9 no. 2; London, U.K.

Short, Ann (1982); *Staff Orientation and Training;* paper presented at Symposium of the Southern African Association for Early Childhood Education, University of Bophuthatswana, Mafeking, R.S.A.

Thorpe, Mary; Edwards, Richard and Hanson, Ann (1993); *Culture and Processes of Adult Learning;* Routledge in association with the Open University, London and New York.

Turney, C. (1973); *The Practicum in Teacher Education: Research, Practice and Supervision;* Sydney University Press, Sydney, Australia.

Vargas-Vargas, Laura; Bustillos de Núñez, Graciela (1988); *Técnicas Particupativas Para la Educación Popular;* Centro de Estudies y Publicaciones (CEP); ALFORJA, San José, Costa Rica.

Web, Anne; Harvey, Leah (1976); *The last step: adding theory to practice; Alternative higher education:* The Journal of Nontraditional Studies; New York.

Werner, David (1979); *Where there is no doctor;* Published by Macmillan Publishers Ltd., London and Basingstoke, U.K.

Working Papers in Early Childhood Development

The current list of Working Papers in ECD.

Papers 1 to 14 were published as Studies and Evaluation Papers

1* Risk factors and the process of empowerment, **Maria Chávez**	July 1991
2* Assessing pre-schools: an ethnographic approach (from a South African evaluation), **M.G. Whisson and C.W. Manona**	July 1991
3 Reflections on working with Ethiopian families in Israel, **Michael Ashkenazi**	October 1991
4 Linking theory to practice: the experience of the Partnership in Education project, Strathclyde, Scotland, **Fiona Orton**	October 1991
5 Building on people's strengths: the case for contextual child development, **Gerry Salole**	July 1992
6 Child survival and child development in Africa, **Dr Ibinado S. Agiobu-Kemmer**	July 1992
7 The role of refugee women and children of Afghanistan today, **Nancy H. Dupree**	July 1992
8 Parent run day care centres: the growth of a French community initiative, **Josette Combes**	December 1992
9 From store cupboard to family room: how parents pushed open the doors of a Scottish nursery school, **Elly Alexander**	December 1992 December 1992
10 The process of change: altering the practice of care in a children's home in the Middle East, **Birgitta Gälldin Åberg**	April 1993
11 Multicultural approaches in education: a German experience, **Carmen Treppte**	April 1993
12 Educational development of students following participation in a pre-school programme in a disadvantaged area in Ireland, **Dr. Thomas Kellaghan and Betty Jane Greaney**	February 1994
13 Selecting and training community promoters in Latin America, **Jani Brouwer and Sergio Martinic**	July 1994
14 *Planteamientos multiculturales en la educación: una experiencia alemana*, **Carmen Treppte**	July 1994
15 Developmentally appropriate outdoor play environments, **Jimi Jolley**	August 1995
16 The rationale for experiential/participatory learning, **Kate Torkington**	February 1996

*These publications are out of print. They are available on paper and microfiche at ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, VA, USA 22153-2852. Fax: 1.703 4401408.

About the Foundation

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private institution based in The Netherlands that concentrates its resources on support for early childhood development. The Foundation takes its name from Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist who died in 1958 and gave the entire share capital of his worldwide packaging industry for humanitarian purposes. The Foundation's income is derived from this industry.

The Foundation's central objective is to improve opportunities for young children who live in disadvantaged circumstances. It does this by supporting the development of innovative field-based approaches in early childhood development, and by sharing experiences with as wide an audience as possible in order to influence policy and practice.

For further information about the Bernard van Leer Foundation, or for a complete list of its publications, please write to the address below.

Printed on recycled paper

Information on the series

Working Papers in Early Childhood Development form a series of background documents drawn from field experience to present relevant findings and reflections on 'work in progress'. The series therefore acts primarily as a forum for the exchange of ideas.

Some of the papers arise directly out of field work, evaluations and training experiences from the worldwide programme supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. Others are contributions which have a particular relevance to that programme. All are aimed at addressing issues relating to the field of early childhood care and development.

The findings, interpretations, conclusions, and views expressed in this series are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Copyright is held jointly by the authors and the Foundation. Unless otherwise stated, however, papers may be quoted and photocopied for non-commercial purposes without prior permission. Citations should be given in full, giving the Foundation as source.

Contributions

Contributions to this series are welcomed. They should be drawn from field experience and be a maximum of 15,000 words. Contributions can be addressed to the Communications Section at the address given below.

Bernard van Leer Foundation,
P.O. Box 82334,
2508 EH The Hague,
The Netherlands
Tel : +31.70.351 20 40
Fax: +31.70.350 23 73